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WASHINGTON – High noon for Rep. Ralph Regula and his two rivals for the vaunted post of House Appropriations Committee chairman will come in January.

But, meanwhile, they will have a number of important skirmishes. Two will come this Wednesday when the three make their respective cases before two influential House Republican groups with very different agendas.

One is the Republican Study Committee, a group of conservative lawmakers. The other is the Tuesday Group, composed of moderates. Making pitches to them will be Regula, R-Bethlehem Township, and Reps. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., and Harold Rogers, R-Ky.

“Quite a lot of authority is vested in this person (appropriations chairman) who ... controls the overall direction of one-third of our taxpayer dollars,” said Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., chairman of the Tuesday Group, of which Regula is a member.

The decisive moment comes when a new Congress convenes in the first week of January. That’s when the Republican Steering Committee, made up of the 29 top Republican House leaders, meets to interview the candidates and nominate one as chairman.

The Republican Conference, made up of all the GOP House members, rubber stamps the choice.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., who heads the conference, has five votes. As second in command, Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, has two votes. Other steering committee members have one vote each.

Regula and Rogers are both members of the steering committee. Regula represents GOP lawmakers in Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia, while Rogers stands in for his region.

The majority of GOP lawmakers from Ohio back Regula's bid, sources say.

Hastert has not said if he has a preference among the three candidates, his spokesman John Feehery said.

"The speaker has not said a word," according to Feehery. "It's pretty delicate."